

1999 CROP-WEATHER SUMMARY

MAY: Warm and dry weather conditions prevailed during the month of May, continuing the April dry spell where Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all received less than a third of their normal precipitation total. Farmers were able to work their fields early and spring activities progressed quickly. By the end of May, potato and small grain planting was virtually complete, and field corn planting was about one week ahead of the 5-year average. Favorable pollination conditions during the month led to an average to above average fruit set for apples. Emerged sweet corn and other vegetables looked good, but at month's end, all crops needed more rain.

JUNE: The weather during the month of June was hot and dry for most of New England. As the month came to a close, most areas around New England had received below normal amounts of precipitation. The number of growing-degree-days (Base 60F) were way ahead of normal for nearly all reporting stations. The warm sunny weather, when combined with irrigation, advanced crop development and retarded disease and insect pressures. The condition of the first cutting of hay was good to fair but, many farmers were concerned about the follow-on cutting because of the poor growth due to the lack of moisture. Potatoes were planted earlier than normal. This year's shade tobacco crop was also planted ahead of last year's crop and the five year average. The warm sunny weather provided good conditions for pollinating the cranberry crop in Massachusetts, but the warm dry weather started drying the bogs towards the end of the month. There were a few reports of sweet corn being harvested the last week of June. Some scattered thunderstorms moved across the region the last week of June. They provided relief in a few locations, but many crops still needed moisture.

JULY: After hot dry conditions persisted throughout most of July, almost all 89 weather stations in New England reported below normal amounts of precipitation for the 4-week cumulative total. Although there were a few passing thunderstorms during the month, most areas were in still need of moisture, especially southern New England. With extreme heat and lack of rain, farmers stayed busy irrigating crops whenever possible. Because of the near constant irrigation, some ponds were starting to dry up as the month came to a close. The first cutting of hay was reported in good to fair condition, but follow-on cuttings were hurt due to lack of moisture. In some locations second and third cuttings were not possible because of the long dry spell. Corn fields that were irrigated grew well under the hot July sun. But where irrigation was not available or where no rain showers fell, the corn was stunted and the ears did not fill out. In the middle of the month many tobacco farmers in the Connecticut River Valley started harvesting their crop. There were a few reports of blue mold in this year's crop but no widespread outbreaks were reported. As the month came to a close, the tobacco crop was reported in good condition. The size of some fruit was average to below average. A few vegetable farmers were harvesting sweet corn the first week of July. In many areas there were not quite as many problems with pests, which may have been partly due to the hot and dry weather.

AUGUST: The hot dry weather continued to take its toll on many crops across New England. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman declared the entire states of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts agricultural disaster areas along with the three southernmost counties in New Hampshire (Cheshire, Hillsborough and Rockingham) and all counties in Maine except for Aroostook & Piscataquis. Anyone with irrigation equipment was busy applying water but some sources were depleted. Over half the pastures were in poor to very poor condition by month's end. Some dairymen were

forced to use this year's cutting of hay to help feed their livestock. Scattered rain showers fell in the latter half of the month, promoted enough regrowth in some hay fields to make a second or third cut possible. The hot summer did not seem to affect the condition of the apple crop, as much as the size of the . The peach and pear crops did not seem to handle the heat quite as well as the apple crop. Massachusetts' cranberry bogs also benefitted from rain showers received in the second half of the month. Blueberry harvest was nearly finished at the end of August. with both the highbush and Maine's wild blueberry crops reported to be in good to fair condition. During the last week of the month, many farmers were starting to harvest silage corn, some of which had been stunted due to the lack of moisture. The oat and barley harvest was nearing completion in Maine, while the potato harvest was about 50% completed in southern New England and just getting underway in Maine. Compared to previous years, there were not as many reports of blue mold in this year's Shade and Broadleaf tobacco crop.

SEPTEMBER: The first significant amount of rainfall for the 1999 growing season was received across most of New England in mid-September. Most of this rainfall was from the remnants of Hurricane Floyd. Despite the rain, moisture was received too late in the growing season to aid most crops, although it helped restore pond, reservoir, and groundwater levels. By the end of the month, all 67 New England counties had been declared USDA agricultural disaster areas or were contiguous to a county that was declared an agricultural disaster area. Maine wild blueberries were all harvested in early September and highbush were done by month's end. Cranberry harvest began then end of August. The summer's long dry spell reduced the size of the fruit in many apple, peach, and pear orchards. The condition of the pear crop began the month in good to fair condition, but as the month progressed, the condition declined to fair to poor. Apples and peaches seemed to withstand the dry summer a little bit better. At the end of the month, the apple crop was reported in good condition while the peach crop was reported in fair condition. The rains did help the condition of many pastures and hay fields. Farmers were hoping to get one final cutting of hay before the season came to an end. The corn silage harvest was slowed slightly during the middle of the month due to wet fields. Tobacco farmers in the Connecticut River valley completed harvesting their crop by the end of the month. There were not as many "blue mold" reports this season than in years past. In late September, the potato harvest in Aroostook County, Maine was behind last year and five year averages because field were too wet for harvesting equipment.

OCTOBER: Maine's potato harvest had reached the halfway point in early October when wet conditions returned, prohibiting field entry at many locations. Farmers struggled with wet conditions for the remainder of the month, and were forced to leave some potato acreage unharvested. Although field corn harvest was also slowed by excessively muddy fields, summer long drought conditions had forced early maturity, and the bulk of the crop was harvested ahead of schedule. Many locations received frost the first full week of the month. The frost brought the vegetable harvest season to a close at most areas. Rains during September aided pasture and field growth, therefore some farmers were able to get a final cutting of hay although not as many cuttings as usual. Fruit size was generally average to below average at many locations because of the dry year, however quality was excellent for the same reason. Maine's wild blueberry farmers were active with field mowing and burning. Cranberry harvest neared completion and was rated in good to excellent condition.